

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

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LIMDIS

FOLLOWING REPEATS BEIRUT 6011 ACTION SECSTATE 8 JUL 76

QUOTE S E C R E T BEIRUT 6011

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LEB

SUBJECT: HUMANITARIAN PROBLEM IN BEIRUT

REF: STATE 168513

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: OUR IMMEDIATE REACTION IS TO
WELCOME ANY EFFORT WHICH HAS POSSIBILITY OF RELIEVING THE SUFFERING
AND HARDSHIP PRESENTLY FACING CITY OF BEIRUT AND ITS DECIMATED
POPULATION.THE SPECTACLE OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S MAJOR CITIES, A

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NATIONAL CAPITAL AND THE HOME OF HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS, BROUGHT TO

ITS KNEES VIRTUALLY WITHOUT SECURITY FOR LIFE OR PROPERTY, WITHOUT ELECTRICITY, LIMITED WATER SUPPLY, COMMUNICATIONS AND OTHER ESSENTIAL SERVICES WOULD NORMALLY CALL FOR ASSISTANCE FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD. AT SAME TIME WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT THIS CRISIS UNLIKE A NATIONAL DISASTER, IS MAN-MADE, AND LEBANESE HAVE THE CAPABILITY IF NOT ALWAYS THE WILL, TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS. THUS, THERE IS STILL GOOD CHANCE LEBANESE WILL MUDDLE THROUGH SOMEHOW AND, IN ANY CASE, WE DO NOT BELIEVE MEDICAL, HEALTH OR SUPPLY SITUATION IN BEIRUT HAS YET REACHED THE POINT WHICH DICTATES STEP PROPOSED. FURTHERMORE, WHILE SITUATION HERE COULD SUDDENTLY DETERIORATE TO POINT JUSTIFYING OUTSIDE HUMANITARIAN ACTION, FOR PRESENT WE CONSIDER THAT THE CHANCES OF SUCCESS OF LOCAL EXPEDIENTS VERSUS COST OF LIKELY FAILURE OF INTERNATIONAL EFFORT BECAUSE OF POLITICAL OBSTACLES ARE GREATER. BEIRUT LIVING CONDITIONS ARE MORE UNCOMFORTABLE THAN DANGEROUS FOR MAJORITY OF CITIZENS FROM VIEW-POINT SANITATION, HEALTH AND SUPPLY. AS LONG AS THERE IS SOME WATER FLOW AND FOOD, WE BELIEVE PRESENT SITUATION IS MANAGEABLE -- PARTICULARLY AS LEBANESE PURSUE THEIR CURRENT EFFORTS TO REPAIR ELECTRIC POWER LINES. THESE EFFORTS OFFER SOME HOPE THAT WITHIN WEEK 35 PERCENT OF ELECTRICITY WILL BE RESTORED, PERMITTING PUMPING OF CERTAIN AMOUNT OF CITY WATER.

2. POLITICAL OBSTACLES: LIKELIHOOD THAT ANY PARTY WOULD ACCEPT PROPOSITION IS SLIM. SYRIANS, AS WELL AS CHRISTIANS, SEE THEMSELVES IN STRONG POSITION TO BRING PALESTINIANS TO KNEE AND WOULD BE HESITANT TO GIVE PALESTINIANS AND LEFTISTS BREATHING SPELL. LATTER, MEANWHILE, WOULD PROBABLY BE INCLINED TO VIEW OUTSIDE TRUCE INITIATIVES WITH SUSPICION AS AN ATTEMPT TO "INTERNATIONALIZE" THE LEBANESE CONFLICT.

3. HEALTH AND MEDICAL CONDITIONS.

A. AUH CHIEF OF STAFF SAMUEL ASPER SAYS HE SEES SO FAR NO INCREASE IN COMMUNICABLE OR NUTRITIONAL DISEASES OVER NORMAL YEARS. ASPER KNOWS OF NO VERIFIED GASTRO-ENTERITIS. HOWEVER, ASPER VERY APPREHENSIVE OVER POSSIBILITY OF A HEPATITIS EPIDEMIC FROM SEWAGE SEEPING INTO LOW PRESSURE WATER LINES. TYPHOID AND CHOLERA ALSO RESENT A THREAT DUE DETERIORATION OF SANITATION CONDITIONS.

B. SHORT SUPPLY ITEMS WHICH AFFECT HOSPITALS, INCLUDING
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THAT OF THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL, ARE MEDICINES, WATER, GENERATOR FUEL, GASOLINE AND BUTANE COOKING GAS. AUH HAS LOOSE AGREEMENT WITH SOME FIVE WEST BEIRUT HOSPITALS TO EXCHANGE URGENTLY NEEDED ITEMS. AUH CONTINUES TAKE BRUNT OF SERIOUS CASUALTIES IN BEIRUT AREA, GIVING PREFERENCE TO PATIENTS WHO UNLIKELY BE WELL CARED FOR ELSEWHERE, I.E. PATIENTS WITH CHEST, BRAIN, OR HEART INJURIES. AUH SENDS MANY POST-OPERATIVE PATIENTS

TO RECUPERATE IN OTHER HOSPITALS.

C. MEDICAL SUPPLIES AT AUH ARE AT REASONABLE LEVEL AND HOSPITAL COULD HOLD OUT FOR ABOUT A MONTH ON MANY ITEMS ALTHOUGH ANTIBIOTICS AND COMMODITIES SUCH AS DISPOSABLE SHEETS ARE IN SERIOUS SHORTAGE. AUH RECEIVED AID/FDA SHIPMENT INCLUDING MANY URGENTLY NEEDED MEDICINES OVERLAND FROM DAMASCUS ON JULY 7 AND EXPECTS TO CONTINUE IMPORT SUPPLIES VIA OVERLAND ROUTE AS LONG AS AIRPORT REMAINS CLOSED. AUH OBTAINING OXYGEN SUPPLIES FROM SYRIA BY TAKING RUCK OVERLAND TO DAMASCUS WHERE EMPTY CYLINDERS EXCHANGED FOR FULL. HOWEVER, EXHORBITANT GASOLINE RATES MAKE BEIRUT/DAMASCUS RUN EXTREMELY EXPENSIVE. AUH GENERATOR RUNNING AT RUDECED LEVEL. HOSPITAL HAS GENERATOR FUEL FOR LESS THAN 20 DAYS AND IS ANXIOUS OVER SIDON REFINERY SHUTDOWN.

D. WATER SCARCITY IS BY FAR MOST SERIOUS SUPPLY CIRIS AND HEALTH HAZARD IN BEIRUT. PRESENT AUH WATER SUPPLY COMES FROM THREE BRACKISH WELLS ON AUB CAMPUS AND SPORADIC FLOWS OF CITY WATER. WITH TANKS FULL AUH CAN OPERATE AT NORMAL RATE FOR FIVE DAYS, BUT ON JULY 7 TANKS WERE DOWN TO 15 PERCENT CAPACITY AND HOSPITAL CONTEMPLATED CLOSURE TO NEW ADMINSSIONS TO AVOID CATASTROPHY. HOWEVER, SMALL WATER FLOW INTO AUH TANKS BEGINNING EARLY MORNING JULY 8 (POSSIBLY AS RESULT DEMARCH EMADE TO AUTHORITIES) CONTINUES AT LOW PRESSURE THOUGH COULD CEASE SOON.

E. ACCORDING TO ALL INFORMATION, DEAD ARE BEING BURIED PROMPTLY IN URBAN AREAS. SITUATION ON FIELDS OF BATTLE MAY BE DIFFERENT.

4. SUPPLY SITUATION.

A. UTILITY SERVICES VIRUTALLY NON-EXISTENT IN WEST BEIRUT ALTHOUGH BASIC NEEDS ARE STILL MET. HUNGER AND THIRST
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ARE MAINLY A PROBLEM OF BATTLE FRONT AREAS THOUGH WATER AND FOOD ARE IN INCREASINGLY SHORT SUPPLY.

B. WATER. MUNICIPAL WATER SUPPLY HAS BEEN LARGELY INOPERATIVE FOR THREE WEEKS DUE ELECTRICAL FAILURE AND INABILITY OF PUMPING STATIONS TO OPERATE. WATER STORAGE TANKS IN BUILDINGS AND CITY'S LIMITED AND OFTEN IMPURE OR BRACKISH WELLS HAVE COMBINED WITH SPORADIC AND LIMITED CITY WATER FLOW TO PERMIT THE CITY TO CONTINUE TO EXIST. BOTTLE WATER SCARCE AND EXPENSIVE BUT STILL AVAILABLE. MUNICIPAL WATER HAS BEEN RATIONED ON UNPREDICTABLE BASIS TO VARIOUS QUARTERS, BUT WITHOUT ELECTRICAL POWER, BUILDINGS WITH STORAGE TANKS ARE UNABLE REFILL. BUCKETS USED TO CARRY WATER FROM STREET LEVEL INTO BUILDINGS.

C. ELECTRICITY. CITY HAS EXPERIENCED ALMOST TOTAL ELECTRICAL OUTAGE SINCE JUNE 22 WHEN HIGH TENSION LINES WHICH

PASS NEAR TELL ZAATAR HIT IN RIGHTIST ATTACK ON PALESTINIAN CAMP THERE. SOME INSTITUTIONS AND HOTELS HAVE GENERATORS THOUGH GENERATOR FUEL EXPENSIVE AND SCARCE AND SHUTDOWN OF ZAHRANI REFINERY NEAR SIDON THREATENS TO WORSEN SITUATION. AMERICAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL AND EMBASSY BOTH HAVE AROUND 20 DAYS GENERATOR FUEL LEFT. ELECTRICAL OUTAGE HAS ALSO CAUSED BREAKDOWN IN TELEPHONE SERVICE THOUGH SPORADIC SERVICE AVAILABLE DUE USE OF BATTERY SYSTEM. PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS HAVE BEEN THAT REMAINING LIMITED ELECTRICITY WOULD BE RATIONED FOR WATER PUMPING AND WHERE POSSIBLE TO BAKERIES AND HOSPITALS.

D. THERE IS NO SERIOUS SHORTAGE THOUGH PRICES ON ALL ITEMS, EXPECIALLY MEAT AND FRESH FOODS HAS GONE UP. POOR FAMILIES SOMEHOW APPEAR TO MANAGE BY MUTUAL HELP SYSTEM AND LIVING ON STOCKED SUPPLIES. FACT THAT SOME HALF OF BEIRUT'S NORMAL POPULATION NO LONGER HERE HELPS SUPPLY SITUATION ALL AROUND. BREAD, BASIC ITEM IN LOCAL DIET, IN VERY SHORT SUPPLY DUE BOTH FLOUR SHORTAGE AND ELECTRICAL SHUTDOWN OF BAKERIES.

E. GARBAGE DISPOSAL. GARBAGE REMAINS UNCOLLECTED IN MANY AREAS THOUGH NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS SOMETIMES MAKE PERIODIC COLLECTIONS. GARBAGE TRUCKS ARE CITY OWNED AND CAN BE OPERATED ON LOCAL HIRE BASIS. IN OTHER AREAS ACCUMULATION OF GARBAGE HAS REACHED MAMMOUTH PROPORTIONS, PROVIDING BREEDING PLACE FOR RAPIDLY GROWING RAT POPULATION. PERIODIC GARBAGE BURNING FOULS THE AIR IN MANY DISTRICTS.

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F. PETROLEUM. GASOLINE IS IN ACUTELY SHORT SUPPLY AND ITS PRICE HAS INCREASED COST OF ALL GOODS BROUGHT INTO THE CITY FOR SALE. WE WERE INFORMED THIS MORNING THAT TAXI DRIVERS WILL PAY AS MUCH AS \$7.00 PER GALLON FOR GASOLINE.

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